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ABSTRACT

This research report identifies conditions and methods that focus on the daily classroom events of experienced teachers whose equity pedagogy results in effective teaching of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class groups. The research suggests that such methods elicit the kinds of dialogue that enrich the knowledge of all those who engage in these processes. The findings are based on four different studies of teacher/researcher collaborations which included a total of 25 experienced teachers. The studies outline a handful of research methodologies that foster constructivist conversations about the kinds of knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions required for effectively teaching all students. The conclusions suggest that these methods make teacher knowledge explicit and at the same time expand the supervisor/researcher's own knowledge based about equity pedagogy. (EH)

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Leveling the Field:

Methodologies that support democratic processes In multicultural supervisory contexts

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Leveling the Field:

Methodologies that support democratic processes in multicultural supervisory contexts

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Background

The current focus on performance-based teacher development and assessments calls for many kinds of knowledge: knowledge of children, of educational contexts, subject matter, teaching and assessments in multiple modalities, reflection, and professional participation (Holmes Group, 1984, 1990; National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, 1994; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). In response to these standards, teachers, supervisors, employers, licensing organizations and teacher preparation programs are inventing ways of identifying these types of knowledge through a variety of processes. Strategies such as teacher portfolios, videotaped teaching episodes, teacher-research, standards based assessments, and clinical supervision cycles aim at documenting explicit demonstrations of knowledge that reveal how teachers make pedagogical decisions.

At the same time that these issues and strategies are evolving there is also interest in conceptualizing and supporting professional development as an ongoing process that is part of the daily work of educators and not as isolated events for teachers (Darling-Hammond, Lieberman, McLaughling, 1995).

This research report identifies conditions and methods that focus on daily classroom events of experienced teachers whose equity pedagogy results in effective teaching of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class groups (Banks, 1993), and suggests that such methods elicit the kinds of dialogues that

enrich the knowledge of all those who are engage in these processes. These findings join other research literature documenting collaborations between teachers and researchers where reciprocal growth takes place through dialogues and conversations about teaching and learning such as the work by Florio-Ruane (1991), Hollingsworth, Dybdal, & Minarik (1993), and more recently, Clark, Moss, Goering and others (1996).

The findings are based on four different studies of teacher/researcher collaborations. They outline a handful of research methodologies that foster constructivist conversations about the kinds of knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions required for effectively teaching all students. The conclusions suggest that these methods make teacher knowledge explicit and at the same time expand the supervisor/researcher's own knowledge base about equity pedagogy.

PARTICIPANT SAMPLE

This study examined "conversations" from four researcher/teacher studies of practices in multicultural settings that included twenty-five experienced teachers. Seven teachers participated in a 1993 curriculum review study designed to document enacted curriculum in learner and learning-centered urban schools. Nine middle school teachers participated in a 1994 teacher-research initiative designed to address equity and excellence in suburban classrooms undergoing demographic shifts. Seven teachers participated in a 1995 study of learner-centered teacher preparation programs, and their practices were being studied as exemplars of their preparation. Two early childhood teachers participated in a 1997 documentation study of a support group for teachers who were applying for National Board Certification as Early Childhood Generalists. The participants' teaching experience ranged from five

to thirty years in the profession and a third of the group (8) was composed of teachers of African-American or Latino descent. The common thread that run throughout the four studies was the documentation of enacted practices in classrooms of experienced teachers in multicultural settings and to determine the kinds of knowledge that informed their practices.

RESEARCH DESIGN

There was a two-stage review of data from the four studies. First, the researcher identified "constructivist conversations" between researchers and teachers that showed evidence of a reciprocal deepening of understandings about schooling in multicultural settings. Second, the researcher outlined the methods or conditions that elicited these conversations.

For example, in the curricular review study and in the learner-centered teacher preparation study teachers had been observed and interviewed. When asked to review the observations that had been made in their classes, the transcriptions of their interviews, and to participate in data analysis - twelve of the fourteen teachers reacted in a very reflective manner. Their responses deepened the teacher's own reflections and the researcher's interpretations. When Sally* read the transcriptions of her interview about a social studies classroom discussion, she added:

> Oh, I didn't realize how inarticulate I was. The tape recorder doesn't record all that body language I use. I have to tell you more about why I had this discussion with the kids. (Moves into a reflective mode) I know that immigration is an important study for children this age, in this city, and in the curriculum standards, but I also wanted to know how my kids actually felt about changing places and moving in general. I have children who have a hard

time at transitions. I wanted to see if they had strong feelings about change in general. So I started the unit on immigration by asking "Have any of you ever moved from one place to another? What did you think? And how about moving from one school to another? Or moving all your backpacks into the cafeteria before going home?

This conversation would probably have never happened if the teacher researcher collaboration had not included the teacher's involvement in reviewing protocols and naming salient themes. In this set of cases, the researcher isolated evidence-based feedback and shared construction of interpretations as two methods that elicited reflection and deepened understandings in both the teacher and researcher. Another example of how shared construction of interpretations increase everyone's knowledge of a situation emerged when the same teacher was asked to review the themes the researcher had identified about her curricular knowledge and to suggest things that might need to be added. She read the researcher's analysis and explained:

> I think a lot of what I teach is because of this school. So it is just more that what I know about children and social studies and resources, but what I can do in this school. I think the kind of school is another category or theme that you need to highlight. Theme is what you call it right? Here (at this school) I can start a unit with a personal question for the children- and it is okay. I don't have to start it by citing the number of immigrants that came at the turn of the century, the countries where they came from, or the local wars that made them leave their homelands. I get to all of that but here I can start from the children's experiences.

After that comment, the researcher did further probing to determine if the observed practices were a result of the context or of the teacher's general pedagogical knowledge. " Would you teach in another type of school?" the researcher asked:

> Sure, but I would have to be more savvy about how they work at another school. I think, though those in each school you can always find people who are teaching this way. I don't think it's just the school. You cannot always choose where you teach but the kids need to learn in all the schools. In a large school system like this one, they just send you to where they want.

These additional data helped the researcher ascertain this teacher's knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about effective practices. Upon reflection, the researcher became very aware of how much more learning seems to occur when research participants help to co-construct interpretations of their practice.

FINDINGS

By applying this systematic process for identifying constructivist conversations and their related methods the researcher identified four research methods that seemed relevant to supervision. The four methods are:

1) Evidence-based feedback,

2) Shared construction of interpretations,

3) Achievement-focused on-line conversations, and

4) Shared discussions of standards-based video segments.

Examination of these four methodologies suggests that in addition to their obvious use in research, they have implications for supervisory situations in teacher education and in in-service teacher supervision.

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1) Evidence-based feed-back:

Teachers in the study of graduates from learner-centered programs and teachers from the curricular review studies showed high incidence of added reflection after reviewing observations from their classrooms. These added reflections often pointed to different areas of knowledge that might not have been so evident to the observer.

For example, when one of these teachers was asked about the large number of sketches of buildings that were posted on boards and walls inside and outside her classroom - because the researcher was probing for additional information on the sources of these detailed sketches - the teacher made explicit her views on how children learn and make demonstrations of what they know through visual representations. In addition, she also expressed beliefs and attitudes that foster a sense of community in a multicultural classroom of seven and eight year old children. (When reviewing the sketches, the teacher thoughtfully walked around the room as if recalling the source of each sketch, and thoughtfully responded):

> It's funny you noticed these sketches. The kids hardly do anymore. It's part of how we do things here. I guess they are so used to sketching their block building structures - in case that they want to build it again - that they just do it automatically. Now they even look at each other's sketches to see if they can rebuild someone else's structure from the sketch. But another reason why I think they should record their buildings its because it develops their visual abilities and sharpens their perspective. We talk a lot about perspective and the ability to see the same situation. Other times, showing their work in pictures is really important for children whose spoken and written language is not so strong. But more than

anything else, I think it's really important to know that things can be done and seen in different ways. I like to use the term "perspective" to also talk about individual differences and respect for others.

Another example of responses to observations that expand the teacher and the researcher views emerged in Ileana's 5th grade class. There, the researcher had shadowed a student who spent all morning writing a complex story. The researcher described in detail the different ways in which the student had carved time and space to sit and continue her "novel" while the rest of the class did other things, including going to the yard. When the teacher read the observation she seemed surprised as well as informed about a problematic situation she had been trying to address with the particular student, and commented:

> You know I have been so focused on trying to get her to do her math assignments that I did not realize she was spending so much time on that story. It's almost a novel, it seems. Now, I have to find a way to recognize what she has been doing in writing but continue to insist that she use time to do the math assignments. She is really behind. I am glad you showed me the observation. I think it's interesting to see how other people see your kids and your teaching. It is also hard to keep track of all 31 students so it's nice when someone else is keeping track. (Later on that morning the teacher asked the student about her writing. The student showed her all the "chapters" and read important sections to the teacher. When she finished reading it the teacher sat down with her to make a schedule for completing her math in the next few days).

These findings suggest that sharing detailed observations of practice with teachers often lead to reflections and new understandings. These descriptions of practice also may provide supervisors with additional knowledge about the thinking and decision-making processes that each teacher uses in making learner-centered and learning-centered decisions.

2) Shared construction of interpretations

Three of the studies included member- checking of data. In addition to reviewing data for accuracy of information, the researcher asked participants to identify themes that they thought were important to include and to review the interpretations stated in the analysis. These situations also elicited additional teacher reflection and provided the researcher with new insights.

For example, teachers in the teacher-research team were studying self-selected practices they thought would increase student engagement and achievement. Teachers in this study were all middle school teachers in suburban settings where children of color were not doing well in school - thus: trying to identify equity pedagogy- was at the heart of the teachers and the researcher's task. The researcher was documenting the kinds of topics and interventions that these teachers selected to research and to examine the findings in light of professional development opportunities for teachers and of administrative supports for student achievement.

One teacher was studying student motivation by surveying students' attitudes about assignments and projects. At another school, a team was studying what technology was most helpful to students who were new English learners. A social studies teacher was looking at her seventh period students because they were doing poorly academically and were disrespectful of each

other. A science teacher was documenting ways in which she could design projects that were meaningful to all kinds of students.

In several conversations about what the researcher was coding and what the teachers were coding there was extensive talk about how each lens on the same situation raised different issues. For example, teachers and researcher spent several hours discussing a situation that came up on the night of a school function.

The science teacher had been able to secure resources and suggest research project that students were excited about. On this particular evening they were all ready to present projects and perform skits for their families. The teachers had reviewed research literature on parent involvement that informed them of higher parent participation if children's work is shown in exhibitions and performances. They also had reviewed literature that pointed to the need to tap into all children's interest and previous knowledge when selecting research projects.

On the evening of the performance three of the children did not come and nobody seemed to know what had gone wrong. The next day all three of them approached the teacher quietly and apologetically. They had not been able to come because they had no taxi money, no private cars, and public transportation was not available in their neighborhood in the evenings. That same day, the teacher asked them to perform for their class and in the end, they all had the opportunity to present what they had prepared.

At a teacher/researcher meeting this situation was the focus of discussion. The researcher discussed it in light of her lens - what administrative policies and instructional initiatives create safety nets for students and instructional supports for teachers? The teachers, on the other hand, discussed the issue from a very personal perspective. They spoke about how little they

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knew about "these" children. They stopped several times and corrected themselves when using that term and began to use the children's real names. They questioned their assumptions that all children in this particular community would be able to get to school for an evening performance. The fact that there were families with no transportation or money for it seemed totally out of the realm of possibilities in a suburban affluent community. The teacher even decided that from now on she would even enlist her own mother to drive kids to events, if she had to.

Shared discussion of the different interpretations and implications increased teachers and researcher's perspectives. In her findings, the researcher wrote about administrative structures and safety nets but was more explicit about the needs at the middle school level. In addition, she also suggested professional development opportunities that supported learning about students and the social contexts that influence their schooling.

The teachers focused their concerns for knowing more about the children. In addition, they outlined a series of school policies and professional development suggestions that were very insightful. In their conclusions, teachers called for material resources such as books, films, and field trips that helped learn more about poor students. They described teaching structures that supported team teaching so that they could talk to each other about these issues. They regretted not having more diversity in their teaching staff, and they were more interested in the assessment of children in their district.

These findings also suggest that initiatives that ask teachers to engage in constructing interpretations of events is a viable supervisory practice that may lead to "co-constructed" solutions to educational problems in multicultural settings.

3) Achievement-focused on-line conversations

Participants in the teacher-research study and participants of the National Board Certification study group were encouraged to use telecommunications to communicate with the researcher in addition to the face to face meetings. E-mail messages were coded to determine their purpose. At the beginning of both studies "on-line communications" focused on the logistics of setting up studies, making videos, or arranging schedules. The second batch of telecommunications was more focused on practice.

For example, examination of a three-week long set of communications between researcher and a teacher in upstate New York included reflections on particular children, on curricular content, sources of other research findings, and search for organizations that focus on the needs of new English learners. These interchanges also evolved into deeper study on the part of the teachers well as the researcher. Explorations on-line took teacher and researcher on searches at the US Department of Education, ERIC, and The National Council of Teachers of English and to the Center for Applied Linguistics. Eventually, reports on this research project outlined bi-literacy, technology, and strong social studies curriculum as important factors in providing meaningful educational access to all students in a geographically isolated multicultural community (Macdonald, Szessi, 1996). The teachers involved posted their own case of the Impact of Technology in New English Learners on-line and have made presentations on their learning process as they explored new technologies for teaching.

These findings also seem to support Wilson's (1996) contention that telecommunication provide ideal environments for constructivist solutions to educational problems. In his case studies of instructional design, Wilson writes:

> ... A place where learners may work together and support each other as they use a variety of tools and information resources in

their guided pursuit of learning goals and problem-solving activities. (p. 5)

These findings also suggest that on-line technology that is focused on achievement or standards may support supervisory processes in settings where issues of distance, time, and access to resources can be facilitated through telecommunications.

4) Standards-based conversation about video segments

Portfolio directions from the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards asked candidates to submit evidence of their practice in light of performance standards in written and videotaped forms. Teachers in the teacher-research study also videotaped their work and discussed it in light of what they were trying out in support of student achievement. In both studies, the researcher followed the activities of these two groups to document the issues that were raised in these types of groups and the roles that university-based facilitators played in such university-school partnerships.

Conversations in support groups covered a wide range of topics. There were times when participants discussed their lack of access to required supports such as computers and video facilities. Other time's conversations focused on interpretations of the standards or how much evidence was necessary to make particular research claims. However, it seemed that teachers and researcher moved into a more critical analysis of events when video segments were presented for peer review. These interchanges were also different between the two groups. In the teacher research group, most teachers were familiar with the students or school community in the video. In the certification group only the candidate knew the context of her work. But in both cases, video discussions asked many probing questions and often required additional documentation.

For example, in preparation for viewing video segments from national Board Certification candidates, teachers and researcher read and outlined the various standards that needed to be evident in the tape. Next, teachers shared their videos with members of the group (researcher, other teachers, and a nationally certified teacher). From the candidates' perspective these videos were ready to be submitted with their portfolios. However, as standards-focused viewing started, constructivist conversations emerged every time. In the case of a teacher who taught a multiage classroom viewers made the following comments that eventually led to further writing and new retapes:

- Are you sure that someone who hasn't been in your class will be able to tell that your children's age range is so vast?
- To me it looks as if only the taller kids are really curious about the activity.
- Do you think the other kids are interested? Is the activity out of their range? I don't know if you can see that.

(The teacher - whose video it was, responded):

You know, you might be right. I know why those two children are just watching. They are really learning from the older ones because sometimes they pick up more from the older kids that from things I offer. That's why I really like this wide range of 1st, 2nd. And 3rd graders but I see your point. They just look like they are hanging around doing nothing. Maybe I'll write more about multiage.

- What would you do to make it more visually obvious? (Asked someone else in the group).

You know - I don't really know, but I think I might have to retape another day and at a different hour of the day. I did it after lunch

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because it was easier to get the video equipment set up during lunch. My mornings are richer and the small groups are better. I think I'll do a new tape during the morning work period. Everyone seems more engaged in the mornings.

These conversations provided the researcher with deeper perspectives on the role of peer review and teachers setting standards for each other. Since the task requested by the portfolio directions was so explicit it seemed that the critical viewing was less personalized and more directed toward "demonstrations" of something one knows what to do. Participants spoke about difficulties of showing so much in such a short segment. and they are still pondering about that. At this moment (March 1997) these two teachers have sent their portfolios to the National Board and they will participate in the assessment center portion of the certification of this summer. They are still missing the day at the assessment center in the summer.

The experience however, has shown how shared review of standards-based videos fosters critical reflection and points to new directions for practice and documentation.

Conclusions and Implications

The findings of this study imply that these four research methods elicit explicit understandings of teaching and leaning in multicultural contexts. At a time when large numbers of children need supports and safety nets and when more teacher preparation programs are creating professional development partnerships, it is important to identify processes that view effective learner-centered multicultural settings as laboratories for learning about equity pedagogy.

These findings depict desirable practices and methods that could prove as useful in supervision as they are in action research. The findings also support the conceptualization of professional development that recognizes the daily and public practice of teachers as the canvas where reflection and new directions need to be taken from. In addition, the researcher proposes those ongoing cycles of observation, feedback, and shared construction of interpretations be a salient aspect of supervision and peer collaborations. That supervisors as well as researchers who are interesting in descriptions of good practice avoid check-list mechanism that prevent teachers from reflecting and robs supervisors of learning how teachers think about teaching and learning.

The findings also call for further research and documentation of conversations that are mediated through telecommunications on behalf of an equity pedagogy. These understandings will help distance learners, increase access to resources and hopefully make "The right to learn" (Darling-Hammond, 1995) a reality for more children, teachers, and supervisors.

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